PROMOTING RESILIENCE THROUGH DANCE  
NATIONAL CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY 2011  
TIP SHEET AND INFORMATION PACKAGE  
Provided by THE AMERICAN DANCE THERAPY ASSOCIATION

One of the proven benefits of dancing is an increased sense of vitality—an awakening and renewal of one’s life energy. Studies have shown that dance interventions by trained professionals can decrease depression, improve mood and strengthen positive feelings about one’s self. Below find some basic dance activity ideas for children, teens, and families.

Collaboration in Your Community

Getting started:

- Define the group of people who will take part: children, teens, families -- and meet with the organization or program that will partner with you for Awareness Day.
- Once you have identified an organization or program to partner with you go to the SAMSHA website (http://www.samhsa.gov/children/national.asp) and review the various helpful materials and instructions you’ll find there.
- Then fill out the Pledge Form here on the ADTA site to let us know your plans for Awareness Day 2011. Print the form, complete it, and fax it to the ADTA office at 410-997-4040.
- Go to the Awareness Day Toolbox here and download materials as needed for your event.
- Remember to follow up. You'll want to stay in touch with your new collaborating organizations or individuals, and be sure to send a thank you for helping to make your Awareness Day event a success!

For dance/movement therapy professionals

- If you are planning a SAMHSA Awareness Day 2011 local dance/movement event, please do the following;
- Choose an agency, hospital or community organization where you will conduct your dance event and arrange a time and other details for Tuesday, May 3, 2011. If possible arrange to get photo/video releases from your participants and for a photographer or videographer to be present. Your hosts may wish to contact the local media.
- Follow the directions above for completing the Pledge Form and reviewing additional materials on the SAMHSA website.
What you will need:

- Make sure there is a safe large space for dance/movement. It does not need to be a dance studio, but should be free of distractions and big enough that every participant can at least reach to the edge of his or her kinesphere without bumping into someone else.
  - **What is the kinesphere?** The kinesphere is your own personal bubble of space. If you plant one foot on the ground and turn around to reach arms and legs as far as they can go in all directions, that is the full extension of your kinesphere.

- You will need a CD player or another device for playing music. Speakers should be strong enough for the music to fill the dance space you are using.

- You may want to have dance props on hand. Children love to use ribbon streamers, or large light scarves when they dance. It helps them feel their movement expanding into the space.

**Two creative movement structures that help people of any age feel their own strength and coping resources**

**Appreciation statues:**

People should get into pairs, partnering with someone they know. Each is invited to think about the other person: What is one thing you are thankful about in your partner? What is one thing about that person that helps you get through hard times? Then you become the sculptor and the partner becomes the clay. Ask permission first, and if your partners says it is ok, move your partners’ arms and legs, head, fingers, etc. into a statue that shows the thing you are thinking about them that you are thankful for. Now stand back and look at the statue and give it a name. Share the statue with the group and say what it is you appreciate about your partner. Then switch roles. This can also be done with family members.

**Dancing in circles and lines together:**

Dancing with other people gives us a sense of belonging in a group and of being supported. Decide on rhythmic upbeat music that everyone will like and start dancing. Maybe you know a simple line dance and can teach it to everyone. Move into a circle where every person can see everyone else.
Tip Sheet for Young Children and Families

Children are natural movers! They grow, develop thinking and communication skills, and build self-confidence and close bonds with parents - all through movement. Dance turns simple movements into self expression, communication, and fun.

Dance & Movement Help Children:

- Grow physically strong and healthy muscles and bones
- Develop thinking and communication skills as they explore and interact with the world around them
- Build self-confidence and a positive body image so they feel competent, physically and emotionally
- Practice social skills, healthy body boundaries, and improve impulse control
- Develop close attachments with parents

Parents, caregivers, and teachers can bring dance and movement into children's lives in simple ways!

Play at your child's level: on the floor! You don't need a lot of toys for movement play. Try "bridges and tunnels"! You can make a bridge with your body and your young child can crawl under. Then try it the other way around! Children learn problem-solving skills as they try different actions—climbing up, over, in, or through.

Start a new family tradition: After dinner dancing! Each night one member of the family gets to pick the song, and then...everybody up! Dance through one whole song together. There's always time for one dance before homework and bedtime and doing the dishes. Dance is a way we express ourselves! Try out others' facial expressions, rhythms, and body movements just for fun - it helps us connect with others. Sharing the joy of movement helps everyone build close bonds!

Shy? Need help getting started? Play, " Dance Dance Revolution" or use a dance video to get you going! Children are natural dancers - at one time all adults were too! It's ok to start small, for example, moving just your feet at first and then adding your arms. Rediscover the joy of moving and dancing.

A way to work together: Dance/movement, like the other arts, is a “generational leveler”. In a family, when communicating through creative and playful movement structures, the children are just as capable and articulate as are their parents. It is a great way to “hear” everyone’s voice.

Thanks to dance/movement therapists Dr. Sherry Goodill, BC-DMT; Dr. Suzi Tortora, BC-DMT; Susan Loman, BC-DMT; & Robyne Davis, BC-DMT for material included in these tips! Go to www.adta.org for more information.
Tip Sheet for Teens and Youth Leaders

Getting started making a dance:

- Notice the way people dance together all the time: the everyday choreography of life as people interact, move through the city, wait in line, express their feelings, or eat a meal. There is good raw material everywhere for creating the art of movement.

- Shock your school with dance! Get a group to create a simple dance. Practice it together and sometime when no one is expecting it, perhaps in the lunch room, turn on the music and break into dance! You might want to enlist the help of a teacher or school administrator to help with the planning.

- Dance goes well with poetry—it goes well with art. If you, or others, are expressing your thoughts and feelings in one medium, you can also dance in response to that: it adds a new layer of meaning for you.

Here are some ways to invent movement:

- Imagine your name written in huge letters on the floor and travel on those lines as a pathway. Start with everyday walking, then change it up: travel backwards, sideways, circling. Add gestures, and a sense of character. Repeat some things, pause occasionally and then start up again. This is how dancers play with space and time: and you can do it too!

- Take the actions that you would normally do in your favorite sport, and recreate them just for the fun of moving (without the competition, or the equipment). Now vary the speed, the size or the repetitions of the movement; splice it up and make new combinations of the movements.

- Dances have beginnings, middles and endings. Think about entering and exiting. What is the message you want to convey in the movement?

Add some music, add some people, add some costumes….and you have a dance!

- Some teens feel shy about dancing. It can be easier if there is a little bit of structure. Get some favorite music going and turn it into a “Soul train” with two lines facing each other. The two people facing each other at the end travel down the “train” together. Most will find it fun to travel with a partner!
Information on
Dance and Dance/Movement Therapy for Healing and
Building Resilience After Trauma

“Dance me back to Myself”

In the darkest of times, when feeling most alone, when the worst thing has happened, there is always still your breathing, and your breathing is a kind of dance. It is the constant dance. There is always the impulse to stamp your feet in anger, shake with frustration, to lift your arms in hope or to be helped. This action is the beginning of a dance back to your healthy whole self. Whether there is music or not, whether there is a lot of space to move in or if you are sitting in a chair, if you have movement limitations or if you are able bodied, whether you have lots of money or very little, even if you’ve never been to dance classes, there is always a part of you, of everyone, that can express the feeling inside with a gesture or posture or rhythm. Dance is the body singing, shouting, and painting in the space. It can be a way back to your self.

Children and teens who have experienced trauma can find strength, resilience and the will to go on through facilitated dance/movement expression.

Children who have been traumatized can sometimes misread neutral social cues and react as though the trauma is reoccurring or about to occur again. In dance/movement therapy, the child learns body awareness, how to monitor his or her internal sensations of fear or anger, and ultimately how to tell the difference between threat and safety. The trauma-informed care team should include a dance/movement therapist who can help children or teens take these steps in a safe way, according to an individualized plan.

Dance is movement. Movement is change. Moving with one’s whole body, with and against gravity, one learns to both yield and resist, to feel one’s strength and to feel one’s vulnerability, to try on new qualities of action and behavior. This is what it means to be fully human.

Some real life examples:

In a community setting: After experiencing the loss of three schoolmates from suicide, a group of 10 teens worked with two dance/movement therapists during a community wide Celebration of Hope. They each remembered someone they had lost and then embodied a gesture, posture or movement pattern that they remembered that person doing. The memorial movement expressions were combined and choreographed into a group performance, videoed, and the videotape shared with the community.

(Contributed by S. Goodill and E. Schelly Hill)
Real life example: Arts Relief through Dance/Movement Therapy

Caption: In the days following Hurricane Andrew, dance/movement therapist Susan Kleinman, BC-DMT, works with children in a Miami shelter, helping them release and express their emotions following that natural disaster and trauma to the community.

Real life example

In a clinical setting: This is a group of 6 girls, ages 7-8, all of whom had experienced abuse or witnessed a parent being abused. All the girls enjoyed making dances and then being "witnessed" -- seen by the other group members. On this particular day, ¾ of the way through the school year, one of the girls asked to do a dance. Her drug-addicted mother had abandoned this child. She was then passed around to many people; observed drugs and sexual activity on a regular basis; then sent to live with her father. Her father told us she never talked about her mother. By the third week of our movement therapy group, the girl started talking about her mother and making up movement stories in which she was an orphaned baby animal. During this group, she asked us to put on slow music. She lay down at one end of the room, which was carpeted and on a slope, then started her dance on her stomach. Using her fingers like claws she tried to claw her way up the slope to where 'her mother was'. Her whole dance was done in one spot. No matter how hard she worked to get there; she couldn’t move her body. Everyone is the group was riveted on her tense trembling body. The other girls started saying, “Let us pull you. We’ll help you to get there.” She shook her head no. She had to do this herself and the truth was that she couldn’t get to her mother or to the nurturing relationship that she needed. After the dance everyone offered comfort. All could relate to this aching feeling so eloquently expressed through her movement. The group ended with everyone dancing together in a dynamic and active way, requested by the girls.
List of some articles and books about dance/movement therapy for children, teens and adults who have experienced trauma, or other challenges.


